

Unlock the Potential of Autistic Employees in Manufacturing

Hiring and retaining autistic employees offers significant benefits: improved productivity, reduced turnover, fewer errors, and enhanced innovation—all with minimal investment in accommodations.

- **Productivity Boost:** Research shows that accommodating autistic employees can increase productivity by 10-20% in detail-oriented roles, especially when clear instructions and consistent routines are provided.¹
- **Reduced Turnover:** Companies can see a 30-50% drop in turnover by supporting autistic employees. This reduction is tied to improved job satisfaction and retention when their needs are properly accommodated.²
- **Error Reduction:** Autistic employees, particularly in quality control and repetitive task roles, can reduce errors by 10-30% due to their strong attention to detail and precision.³
- **Innovation Increase:** Diverse teams that include autistic employees experience a 35% rise in innovative thinking and problem-solving, as neurodiverse individuals offer unique perspectives that drive creativity.⁴
- **Low Cost, High Impact:** Most accommodations, such as noise-canceling headphones or written instructions, cost under \$500 and lead to significant improvements in performance and retention.⁵

Key Skills for Manufacturing

Autistic employees (also referred to as individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or ASD) often bring valuable skills that drive efficiency and quality in manufacturing:

- **Attention to detail** – Spotting errors others might miss.
- **Focus on repetition** – Consistently performing routine tasks.
- **Pattern recognition** – Seeing trends or problems quickly.
- **Logical thinking** – Solving problems with clear reasoning.
- **Precision** – Delivering accurate, high-quality work.
- **Strong memory** – Remembering complex processes easily.
- **Task independence** – Working well without constant supervision.
- **Reliability** – Dependable and consistent performance.
- **Process improvement** – Identifying ways to make things run better.

Barriers to Success

Despite their strengths, autistic employees can face challenges that limit their full potential in manufacturing:

- **Sensory sensitivities** – Noise, lights, or smells can be overwhelming.
- **Unclear instructions** – Ambiguity can lead to mistakes or delays.
- **Sudden changes** – Disruptions to routine can cause stress or confusion.
- **Group communication** – Social cues and group dynamics may be hard to navigate.
- **Time pressure** – High-pressure environments can lead to anxiety.
- **Multitasking** – Switching between tasks can be difficult.
- **Open workspaces** – Lack of privacy or quiet can be distracting.
- **Team collaboration** – Collaborative work may feel uncomfortable or draining.
- **Ambiguity in roles** – Unclear expectations can cause frustration.

- **Technical skills** – Handling machines and troubleshooting effectively.
- **Overstimulation** – Fast-paced environments can lead to burnout.

10 Tips for Leading or Accommodating Autistic Employees

Use these practical strategies to help autistic employees succeed in manufacturing environments:

1. **Give clear instructions** – Be direct and specific; avoid vague directions.
2. **Maintain a routine** – Keep processes predictable and structured.
3. **Provide sensory tools** – Offer noise-canceling headphones or earplugs to manage noise.
4. **Use written communication** – Send instructions via email or task software for clarity.
5. **Break down tasks** – Divide tasks into manageable steps for better focus.
6. **Provide notice of changes** – Inform them early about schedule or process shifts.
7. **Give constructive feedback** – Be clear and specific about what needs improvement.
8. **Reduce unnecessary interruptions** – Minimize avoidable distractions.
9. **Accommodate sensory needs** – Be mindful of triggers like noise or smells and offer reasonable solutions.
10. **Respect personal space** – Allow quiet breaks and downtime in designated areas to recharge.

Most of these tips are simply best practices that can help all employees succeed, but the impact will be far greater for ASD employees, ensuring they reach their full potential.

Additional Resources

Here are a few helpful resources for leaders looking to support autistic employees:

- **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)** – Offers expert guidance on workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities, including autism. <https://askjan.org/>
- **National Autistic Society** – Provides resources and advice for employers on creating an autism-friendly workplace. <https://www.autism.org.uk/>
- **Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)** – A resource created by and for autistic individuals, offering employer guides and resources. <https://autisticadvocacy.org/>
- **Understood.org** – Offers tips and resources for managing neurodiverse teams, including autistic employees. <https://www.understood.org/>

For any feedback, questions, or ideas on how we can further support our teams, reach out to [Samantha Easter](#) or [Dr. Thomas Edwards](#).

Citations

1. *Job Accommodation Network (JAN), Cognassist Report on Workplace Accommodations* ([SpringerLink](#))
2. *Autistic Self-Reliance, Cognassist: Autism in the Workplace*([Autistic Self-Reliance Support Network](#))

3. *NeuroLaunch, Autistic Self-Reliance: Employment and Error Reduction*([Autistic Self-Reliance Support Network](#))
4. *Harvard Business Review, Deloitte Insights on Neurodiverse Teams*([Cognassist](#))
5. *Job Accommodation Network (JAN): Workplace Accommodation Costs*([NeuroLaunch.com](#))